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Keeping Quiet About Soviet Cheating

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New intelligence pointing to illegal Soviet jamming of Cobra Dane, code name of a key U.S. radar in the Aleutians, is forcing early White House political decisions on how Ronald Reagan should handle the torrid nuclear issue in the presidential campaign.

The tentative answer: Reagan will encourage surrogates, including congressional Republicans, to explain the dangers of new nuclear agreements in the face of Soviet violations of existing treaties. Reagan is being strongly advised to keep away from the cheating issue until late in the campaign. His taking the lead, it is felt at almost all political levels, would—however unfairly—put him on the wrong side of the peace issue.

That spells quiet time in the White House despite ever more indications of Soviet nuclear cheating like the jamming of Cobra Dane. The voice of protest and warning will come from Cabinet officials

and Republicans on the Intelligence and Armed Services Committees. Not until late in the campaign, perhaps when Reagan confronts the Democratic nominee in face-to-face debate and after Soviet cheating has been thoroughly advertised, will Reagan zero in on the dangers of unenforceable treaties.

Republican critics of this decision do not like it because they believe it dangerous. Since the only American voice heard in Moscow is the president's, his silence invites more violations. The new, unpublicized suspicion in the intelligence community that the Russians are jamming American radars in the Aleutians makes the danger more manifest.

Starting shortly after the Soviet shooting down of Korean Airlines Flight 007, "electronic signals" were emitted on at least two occasions against the complex of U.S. radars in the vicinity of Shemya Island near the tip of the Aleutians. That is only a few

hundred miles from Siberia's Kamchatka peninsula, the impact area of many long-range nuclear missile warheads being tested by the Russians.

The value of Cobra Dane, along with the airborne and seaborne radars, respectively code-named Cobra Ball and Cobra Judy, that make up the trio of U.S. radars located closest to the Soviet test range, became paramount when the Russians started illegally encrypting data from their missile flight tests. Encryption was one of the seven SALT violations President Reagan charged against the Russians in his report to Congress last month.

With the encryption of test data, the United States found itself far more dependent on the Aleutian radars. Although limited in what they can discover, the radars became essential in determining the degree of another Soviet violation, this one of a SALT proviso limiting the United States and the Soviet Union to a single new long-range missile. The Russians are known to be testing two such missiles.

Jamming of the radars is particularly insidious because it cracks the foundation of U.S.-Soviet nuclear treaties: the right of each party to keep tabs on the other by "national technical means." Radar is a bedrock of "national technical means"—and far more essential for the United States trying to pierce the secrecy of the closed Soviet society than for the Soviets operating in the transparent openness of this country.

The president, however, is not likely to raise the radar-jamming question publicly. Nor will he publicize any part of a new 275-page study of Soviet non-compliance that has been sent to the White House by the General Advisory Committee of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. That eminent, bipartisan body (including such prominent Democrats as former Kennedy adminis-

tration official Burke Marshall) probes Soviet noncompliance in many hitherto unsuspected areas, both nuclear and conventional.

For now, the president will let others ventilate the Soviet chamber of cheating horrors while he tries to stake out a credible arms-reduction position. He will, of course, not compete with the Democrats on nuclear freezes and other panaceas. But if he exploits the cheating issue, says one aide, "he'll be pigeonholed as a nuclear tough guy using Soviet cheating as a cover to resist arms control."

That leaves Reagan with his old litany: that the arms limitation process is a dangerous delusion and that the only safe approach is deep and verifiable arms reduction. Even though Soviet violations have furnished the world with proof that he was right, Reagan intends to let others sound the warning trumpet.

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